

Please Support An Act Concerning Safe Schools: The Enhanced Penalty for Drug Related Offenses Committed Near Schools & Daycare Centers

Connecticut's "drug-free zone" statutes are among the toughest in the nation. These zones cover twice the area of zones in neighboring states, leading to extreme racial disparities and harsh mandatory minimum sentencing for simple drug possession, especially in urban communities.

Our drug-free zones, or "School Zones" law, do not protect children. The Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee (LPR&I) reviewed 300 cases involving persons arrested for mandatory minimum drug sale offenses and **concluded that** *"Mandatory minimum sentencing laws achieve few of their stated objectives and do not work."*

The researchers also found that:

- Except in three cases when students were arrested for drug charges on school grounds *none of the arrests that occurred in drug-free zones were linked to the school, a school-related activity, or students.*
- People who use or sell drugs were unlikely to identify whether they are actually in a drug-free zone – undermining the "deterrence" effect of the law. Just twelve percent of arrests occurred during the traditional school hours of 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- In certain urban and "urban-like" suburban areas, there is no incentive for people selling drugs to move away from school, day-care center or public housing because almost the whole town is identified as a drug zone.

Drug Sentencing Zones are a major cause of racial disparities in CT's incarceration rates

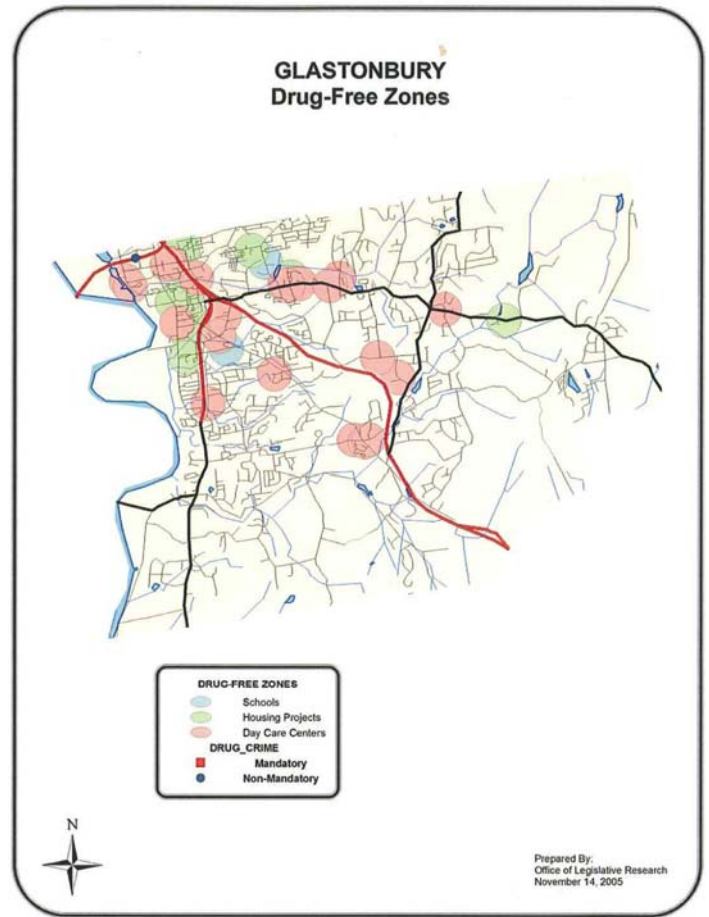
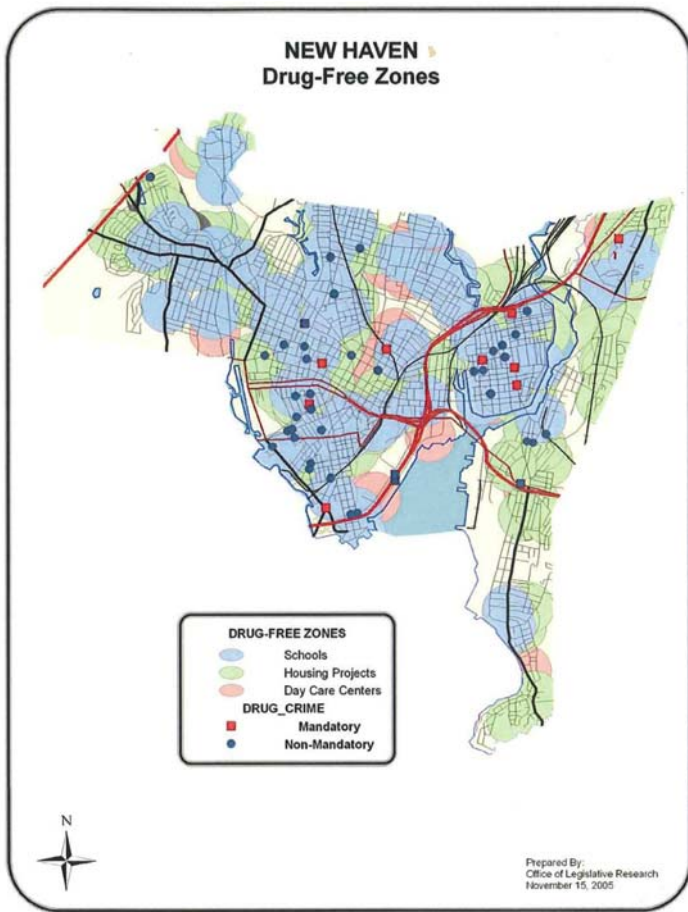
- Connecticut ranks at the top in the incarceration rate racial disparity for whites and Blacks.
- Drug-free zones are more common in non-white communities. Research conducted for A Better Way Foundation determined that localities where more than 25 percent of residents were Black or Latino had zone perimeters that averaged more than six times higher than the average for localities where less than 10 percent of residents were Black or Latino.

An Act Concerning Safe Schools legislation would:

- Make the zones more effective by reducing the perimeter from 1,500 feet to 100 feet outside of a school, day-care center, or public housing project.
- Restrict the time the law is enforced to school hours as it relates to schools and operating hours as it relates to day care centers.
- Remove the mandatory minimum requirement, providing judges with discretion to apply an enhanced penalty of 3 years for possession or selling of drugs in a "school zone."

According to LPR&I, there has been no appreciable decline in drug use or drug trafficking since the introduction of mandatory drug laws, including the state's drug-free zone law.

Drug Penalty Zone Maps Illustrate the Disparity Between Cities



City Demographics (2000 census)

Total population: 123,626
White: 43.46%
Black: 37.36%
Latino (any race): 21.39%
Asian: 3.9%

City Demographics (2000 census)

Total population: 31,876
White: 93.1%
Black: 1.53%
Latino (any race): 2.51%
Asian: 3.4%